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“Drink a twelve box before you go”*: Pre-loading among young people in Aotearoa New Zealand

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* “Dave” from Pākehā FG5

Abstract: The practice of preloading, drinking large amounts of alcohol rapidly in private spaces prior to socialising in the night-time economy has come to notice recently in the study of alcohol related harm but no studies have explored these phenomena in Aotearoa New Zealand. We used a theoretical framework developed with public health alcohol studies for understanding drinking cultures that conceptualises patterns of behaviours as arising within a dynamic interaction between forces of hedonism, function and control. We report findings from 34 focus groups conducted with 18-25 year olds as part of a project supported by the Marsden Fund, between 2011 and 2012, to investigate drinking cultures among young people. Our thematic analyses of participants' accounts of pre-loading show that the term is in common use to apply to a range of practices motivated by price of alcohol but influenced by the pleasures of intoxication, the importance of peer-processes and certain aspects of the regulatory system. We conclude with a discussion of the usefulness of the framework and the implications of the findings for public health policy that aims to reduce alcohol consumption and the harms that follow from it.

Keywords: Alcohol, Young adults, Pre-loading

Introduction

The phenomenon of ‘pre-loading’ among young people – consuming alcohol rapidly to intoxication in private premises (and sometimes public spaces) before going to commercial venues – is of growing concern in Aotearoa New Zealand and internationally. New Zealand media link pre-loading to a concern for public order and safety (King 2013) and excess use of emergency room services (Edwards 2013), potentially requiring curfew on supermarket sales (Chapman 2013). While it is well understood that many young people regard such drinking as ‘fun’ and indeed central to their social lives (Lyons & Willott 2008) there has been relatively little research attention paid to pre-loading practices and motivations and its impacts and implications for policy, particularly in terms of public health and harm reduction.

Despite its deep embedding into cultures, socialising and economic life, alcohol is the direct and indirect cause of much damage to society. The harms can be acute - injury, violence, absenteeism, alcohol poisoning - but also chronic - diabetes, cancers, organ system damage, addiction, dementia (Babor et al. 2010). Alcohol is responsible for 4.6% of the global burden of disease, with those aged between 15 and 29 experiencing over a third of the life-course impacts (Rehm et al. 2009). A consistent international finding is that young people drink to intoxication more frequently than older cohorts (Babor et al. 2010), especially in countries where liberalised alcohol policy facilitates access to alcohol (Huckle et al. 2012).

Much alcohol-related harm is readily preventable. Minimising the individual, interpersonal and societal costs of alcohol, despite the complex and contested nature of such a goal, is a legitimate aspiration for any society. Pre-loading alcohol, particularly among young people, is an increasingly integral part of what research has referred to as a “culture of intoxication” (Measham & Brain 2005). This paper explores young people’s pre-loading practices and their significance in the context of the health and wellbeing of different groups.

Young People and Pre-loading

There are currently two overlapping strands of research and theory on pre-loading, namely consideration of consumption on private premises and more recent work exploring pre-loading as a unique phenomenon. The study of consumption in private places, often referred to as “home drinking” (Foster et al. 2010), has older roots (Casswell et al. 1993; Partanen 1975) concerning its contribution to wider consumption. Contemporary concerns about the availability of cut-price alcohol from supermarkets and other outlets have been grafted onto these pre-existing interests, particularly in terms of how they might change routine legal-age drinking practices (Foster & Ferguson 2013). Although there are some similarities with home drinking, the phenomenon of pre-loading was brought into sharp focus by Wells et al.’s (2009a) conceptual review. These authors offer a range of definitions, demarcations and key characteristics of pre-loading, particularly in terms of its orientation to alcohol price and the issue of rapid consumption, but also the enjoyable social dimensions and the associated harms. A constructive exchange between Room and Livingston (2009) and the original authors (Wells et al. 2009b) clarifies that pre-loading is a specific, emerging drinking pattern that emphasizes drinking to a level of intoxication prior to go out into town or public spaces,

including bars or clubs. The policy implications are as yet unclear but notably involve the relative pricing of alcohol in off-licence and on-licence premises, the closing times of bars and clubs in the night-time economy, the age of legal consumption of alcohol, safety in public spaces and drink-driving

Subsequent research, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, has investigated pre-loading practices in much greater depth. In the UK, focus groups and individual interviews with young legal-age drinkers highlight that price, alcohol ‘banking’ – depositing sufficient in the body so that it can be steadily drawn down over the course of the evening – (Hadfield 2011) and social solidarity are key motivators for pre-loading practices (Forsyth 2010; Measham et al. 2011). MacLean and Callinan (2013) surveyed and interviewed young Australians and found that pre-loading significantly predicted high-risk drinking, and that motivations included social pleasures, price of drinks and enhanced intoxication. Survey research demonstrates that pre-loading is reported by over half of those sampled from night-time economy precincts in the US (Reed et al. 2011) and the UK, particularly by women (Measham et al. 2011). Similar findings have been obtained in Australia where pre-loaders (65% prevalence rate) were more likely to consume excessive quantities of alcohol, experience aggression, injuries, drunk driving and other forms of alcohol-related harm compared to those who did not pre-load (Hummer et al. 2013; Miller et al. 2013).

Research consistently shows significant associations between pre-loading and higher levels of overall consumption, antisocial behaviours and violence (Barton & Husk 2012; Hughes et al. 2008). Labhart et al. (2013) employed a computer-mediated cellphone monitoring design to compare outcomes with and without pre-loading, and found it was associated with nearly twice the volume of consumption and significantly higher levels of harm. Foster and Ferguson’s (2013) review of pre-loading research concluded that pre-loading is a price-driven component of drinking cultures that is consistently linked to increased consumption, drunkenness and risk-taking. Research findings have also led various health authorities in the UK and Australia to highlight the increasing prevalence of the phenomenon and its strong relevance to public health and public order concerns (Hadfield 2011; Lyons et al. 2014; Nicholls et al. 2011; Roberts et al. 2012; Trifonoff et al. 2011).

Despite the absence of research literature around pre-loading in Aotearoa New Zealand, some studies suggest that pre-loading may be a concern. Survey data on the consumption levels and practices of tertiary students (Kypri et al. 2002; Kypri et al. 2009) show high proportions with elevated intakes that equate to binge drinking. Ministry of Health (2009) data shows that private residences are by far the most common location in which alcohol is consumed. McEwan et al. (2011) used interview data to establish that a widespread culture of intoxication exists among tertiary students. The New Zealand Law Commission’s (2010) review of the role of alcohol in society gathered some narratives on pre-loading, in submissions by licensed-premises owners feeling the pressure from the undercutting of alcohol prices by liquor retailers, especially supermarkets. The report cites some of the international studies referred to above and quotes one of their publican submitters:

In the past if someone was going to drink 10 beers in a night, the ratio used to be two at home and eight in a pub. That's reversed now and it's more like six to eight at home and two or four in the pub. (p.43)

It appears that the emerging understandings of the pre-loading phenomenon align with an explanatory framing of drinking cultures proposed by Gordon et al. (2012) to account for contemporary alcohol use. In this three-part schema, *hedonism* refers to observed drinking practices around intoxication and suggests indicators of frequency and level of consumption. *Function* encompasses the psychosocial drivers of drinking such as peer values, ritual and everyday practices, while *control* includes regulatory, social and normative restrictions on alcohol use. The first two dimensions operate to encourage and support consumption while the third consists of various restraints in a context-dependent, dynamic tension. Gordon et al. (2012) note the primacy of sociocultural context in determining the local expression of drinking cultures; however, they argue that the homogenising effects of commercially-driven globalising alcohol cultures observable in Europe, mean this interactive, dimensional model should have a wide applicability. We expect that these three elements will be evident in pre-loading practices within local drinking cultures in Aotearoa NZ and apply the framework to focus group data on youth drinking gathered through a wider project on young people, alcohol and social networking systems (Lyons et al. 2014).

Given the importance of local, sociocultural contexts in drinking practices, we explicitly examined how pre-loading practices and meanings might vary across gender, class and ethnicity groups within Aotearoa NZ. There are differences across these groups that reflect broader societal power relations and forces of inclusion and exclusion, dominance and oppression, privilege and discrimination within Aotearoa NZ (Moewaka Barnes et al. 2014; Spoonley et al. 2004). In this regime, Pākehā culture is the naturalised norm and Māori and Pasifika cultures are marginalised, while women's interests, priorities and socialities are subordinate to those of men. In terms of gender, previous international research shows that both males and females engage in pre-loading practices (Measham et al. 2011). Although in the UK Bancroft (2012) found that female students did not necessarily enjoy the speed and prescriptive nature of pre-loading, they did regard it as necessary preparation for a night out. There seems to be little research conducted that has examined the meanings and practices of pre-loading across various class and ethnicity groups, yet this is important as differences in practices and meanings across these groups may have implications for targeted and more relevant health promotion campaigns and policy considerations. Thus we sought to examine whether the dimensions of Gordon et al's (2012) model were inflected by culture, class and gender during young people's talk about their pre-loading activities, and also whether there were important common characteristics. More specifically, we aim to address a distinct gap in local literatures on the topic, add to the international understandings of pre-loading and contribute to developing relevant interventions to reduce such consumption, as well as policy and media debates. With this broader context in mind, this paper examines how understandings of pre-loading converge and vary across different groups of young people.

Method

Our project took an open-ended approach to understanding youth drinking cultures, building qualitative data sets with Māori, Pasifika and Pākehā aged between 18 and 25 years (i.e. over the legal age for purchase of alcohol) and living in diverse locations in Te Ika a Maui¹. Following university ethical approval, we recruited 141 participants across 34 focus groups through word-of-mouth and snowballing techniques, with a target person inviting their friends to participate. The sample included 80 female, 57 male, and 4 fa'afafine² participants, with most groups between 3 and 7 participants. Twelve groups consisted of predominantly Pākehā participants (4 all female, 4 all male, 4 mixed), twelve of predominantly Māori participants (2 all female, 1 all male, 9 mixed), and ten of predominantly Pasifika participants (3 all female, 2 all male, and 5 mixed). Groups were facilitated by three female doctoral candidates, each matched by culture to one of the cultural strands of the research, and aimed to collect rich, varied, 'thick' (Geertz 1978) experiential accounts. Our sampling processes emphasised diversity and within cultural strands, groups were conducted in rural towns, provincial centres and major cities, with participants from a range of social strata.

Group discussions took place in homes, workplaces, and community rooms, and ran for up to 2 hours. Participants were asked broad questions regarding their socialising (including access to and use of social networking technologies) and drinking practices, allowing free-flowing discussion relevant to the topic to emerge. Discussions were videotaped transcribed verbatim, coded by TM and confirmed/revised following input from all team members. The coding sought all passages concerned with alcohol, drinking, partying, nights out and similar topics, from which were developed thematic descriptions, highlighted with key data excerpts (Braun & Clarke 2012). Pre-loading emerged as a key domain and the findings section focuses on how the phenomenon was understood and engaged with by participants.

Results

In describing our findings below we draw upon Gordon et al.'s framework to report shared meanings and practices that emerged across all participants' talk. Three key themes are derived from this approach, namely 'price', 'social dimensions' and 'limits'. However in focusing on these distinct 'cross-cutting' themes we also highlight the diversity and contextual complexity that resulted from the different cultural domains from which participants speak.

Price

As previous research suggests, one of the key drivers of pre-loading is a wish to avoid the higher price of alcohol in licensed premises by purchasing in lower priced outlets. These concerns were commonly talked about by all of our participants, who articulated a rough-and-ready arithmetic in their explanations of how current pricing of alcohol pushes them toward pre-loading. Quantity consumed was critical to the overall 'price calculation' associated with

¹ The North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand.

² This is a term used, with some variations, in Pasifika cultures for people born male but whose spirit is female.

pre-loading and many groups discussed how much they needed to consume in order to attain desired levels of intoxication.

A mixed group of Māori students from a provincial city respond to the question of why they pre-load:

- Roimata: Well yeah, cos when you go to town, you don't have to buy drinks
[laughter] uni students, so like you're real poor
- Taniera: Like two drinks in town is like the price of like a box at the
supermarket or something *Māori FG3*

The answer offered by Roimata draws confirmatory laughter from the group, possibly arising from her articulation of the self-evident. The laughter prompts an elaboration from Taniera who spells out a rationale for the practice of cut-price purchase through the comparison between licensed and retail outlets. In both the initial statement and Taniera's reply there is a tension between the drive to intoxication and the restraint of price. This co-construction by group members, accompanied by humour, signals a consensus that reflects the taken-for-granted economic logic of pre-loading; "two drinks" in town is dis-preferred, inadequate to the intoxication goal, compared to a box available at the supermarket. This implies that, while a night in town is socially desirable, reflecting Gordon et al.'s notion of function, it clashes with hedonistic goals around intoxication and this is resolved through pre-loading practices aimed at achieving desired levels of intoxication within budget.

In the next excerpt a mixed gender group of five Pasifika participants working in a range of jobs and resident in a suburb of a major city, discuss their experiences of drinking in town:

- Melitiana: I don't buy drinks at the bar cos I can't afford it, but um, it's not only where
you go, it's how you need to get there, like with gas
- Taraleigh: and if you're drinking you've got to taxi and stuff and it's like \$30
- Melitiana: gas alone is expensive, yeah and taxis are expensive.
- Jesse: If you don't pre-drink when you go to town and you feel that your card is quite
comfortable... You'll spend over \$200 a night. Just like that! *Pasifika FG4*

For these young people the importance of price as a control on drinking is elaborated upon to take in the cost of other expenditures such as transport. Pre-loading helps to insulate against these additional costs in Jesse's scenario, which again provides an indication of the quantity consumed reflecting the hedonism driver. At say \$10 per drink, the sum mentioned represents heavy consumption even if a proportion of drinks were shared.

Here a member of an all-male group of Pākehā university students in a major city lays out his ideal:

Dave: Oh yeah I'd say probably like I'd buy like a twelve box on like a Saturday or whenever we're drinking and have that and then have a few drinks in town.

INT: Yep.

Dave: So yeah usually try to drink a twelve box well most nights drink a twelve box before you go.

Pākehā FG5

In this excerpt it seems that both *hedonism* – the aim to get intoxicated before going out – and *function* – the social dimension – encourage consumption, while *control* – the sense of price as a restraint – is also implicated. Dave reports typical practice; the quantity entailed and the sequence of drinking events reflect a pre-meditated intention to get drunk. The repetition of the order of events emphasises the connection of pre-loading to the more desirable but expensive drinking of the night-time economy.

For men the preferred beverage for pre-loading was beer. Women were less explicit about quantity but spoke in terms of bottles of wine or six packs of premixed drinks, these quantities again indicating the hedonistic drive. These are large amounts, given that pre-loading is commonplace and that it is contiguous with drinking in the city, reflecting a widespread commitment to a culture of intoxication (Measham 2006).

Social dimensions

Beyond the issues of price, social dimensions to pre-loading were also highly evident in the data. Participants clearly valued the collective, psychological and identity dimensions of the practice.

Four Māori participants, three of whom are parents from a small town near a provincial city, provided this discussion of pre-loading:

Jane: Actually, oh well we'd drink for like half hour and then realise, “Oh we need to get ready before we get too tipsy” and then we can't get ready and our make-up will look funny so oh yeah go and get ready

Hine: Take us hours

Jane: Then it's go through multiple outfits

Hine: Outfits, the room will be like piled [with] clothes and messy

Jane: Everything's just up, shoes, shoes “what shoes am I gonna wear? That doesn't go with my shoes” kinda thing so you're just like, it takes ages for us to get ready and then it's like, when we drive that's when the most drinking happens.

Māori FG7

In this excerpt the pre-loading is entwined with the social dimensions of the preparations required for a night out in the city. While the goal of intoxication is clear, also at work here is a sense of how drinking is integral to the pleasures and excitements of planning, dressing, and traveling. For these participants, their relatively isolated provincial location is such that they

prefer to go to a major city for its night-time economy, so they pre-drink at home before embarking on the 60 minute drive. They routinely designate one person to be their sober driver and the whole process – including the delicate balance of pre-loading and clubbing – is clearly a major effort involving baby-sitting arrangements, organising transport, thinking through wardrobe options and other plans that need to be in place before they can go.

Participants sketch an intensely gendered social process involving careful control of alcohol, ensuring sufficient quantities to be “tipsy” while preparing, but not to the point of incompetence with make-up or clothes. An intricate, co-constructed and socially shared process is recounted involving multiple stages in which pre-loading is moderated at least until the car journey begins. Even so, later in the transcript they describe the importance of calibrating consumption so that on arrival in town they can avoid appearing too intoxicated and thereby risking rejection by club door-staff. The psychosocial functions of their practices are fitted around an apparently hedonistic drive to constitute pleasure, collectivity and social norms as a shared practice that is heavily dependent on maintaining collective control of consumption in terms of amounts and timing.

These concerns are far more nuanced than the arrangements expressed in this mixed gender Pākehā group of university students and cafe workers in a major city. Tom describes a perhaps more commonplace variant of pre-loading social practices among students in university accommodation:

Tom: Like there was this whole sort of ritual like I was at a hall last year where people would start drinking like as much alcohol as they could between eight o'clock and eleven o'clock. At eleven o'clock they got kicked out of the hall so if you wanted to go to town you had to leave by eleven. So people would get really drunk then go to town and like there'd be a big convoy of about a hundred and fifty people walking all the way down the hill into town. And yeah and then just be in town doing [hands dancing] the town thing.

Pākehā FG8

The curfew on consumption within university halls constrains the time within which sufficient quantities must be consumed to fuel the night out. The use of the terms “ritual” and “convoy” signal a strongly social element that constructs a sense of solidarity which emerges through communal practices of intoxication. Such social processes were often recalled within groups, suggesting that they were narratives often told and retold amongst friends in ways that facilitated on-going social bonding, and were at times constructed as an integral part of what made nights out enjoyable; thus the social aspects of pre-loading suggest it is valued in and of itself, as well as a prelude to fun to be had ‘in town’.

A psychosocial dimension of pre-loading is evoked by Melitiana in the same Pasifika focus group as above.

Melitiana: I used to be the sober driver for my friends and I would have fun and now like I do drink and I admit I kinda am... I can't go out without being drunk, um, but I think if I try to go out sober, it wouldn't ... it's just the way you make the night I think. *Pasifika FG4*

For this participant the function of pre-loading is tied into the psychological preparation for a night out, contributing to the notion of how to “make the night”. Her construction implies that going out sober is less sociable and will not produce an idealised sociable intoxication.

Similar comments were made in other groups where everyday inhibition, extreme shyness and a sense of actually finding the night-time economy just too unpleasant if sober, were all given as personal motivations for pre-loading to intoxication.

In this mixed Pākehā group of three in a provincial city, the women are working in professional roles while the male is a truck driver. The two women outline and rationalise their pre-loading.

Cathy: Drinking at home first in our group. And then yeah all [our friends] why they all turned up drunk [laughs]

Beth: I think a big thing as well is that why you drink at home, a) because it saves you money. It's cheaper. But also because you feel like your night's starting. You're not waiting. *Pākehā FG 11*

Cathy sketches the inherently social process in the household where the drinking begins “in our group”. This nucleus is supplemented by the arrival of others who have also been drinking apparently in their homes before the larger party heads into the city clubs. Beth completes the picture by explaining the advantages of this approach, including price, but emphasising something else that appears to centre on being in control of the process, “not waiting”. The pre-loading flows into the outing to town but also functions to make the group less dependent on the prices, premises, license or timeframes of others. It serves hedonistic and social functions but also circumvents external controls allowing the group to determine their drinking.

Limits

Many participants talked about aspects of managing the processes that in various ways impede or otherwise impact on their pre-loading practices. Gordon et al. emphasise legal or regulatory processes but also acknowledge social and normative elements in their dimension of *control*. Our participants have little to say on the former (except to highlight the ease of access for them as legal-age purchasers of alcohol) and stress informal social, managerial and physiological restraints.

In this mixed gender Pasifika group from a low-decile suburb of a large city, there is a sense of constraint on where they can drink.

N: We always have a plan

- Lina: yeah what's your plan?
 N: Just go and pick up everybody, and drink and find a spot to drink, then go to town and drink more, go clubbing and then we go home
 Lina: do you guys buy drinks?
 L: and have a feed *Pasifika FG7*

This excerpt points to social but transitory arrangements using cars either parked or possibly while driving. Later these participants discussed ways in which city liquor bans have meant that consumption in public places like parks is no longer viable and that most of their pre-loading now takes place in friends' flats. Strong proscription of youth drinking by Pasifika families and churches often rules out their homes as private spaces of consumption, while the high level of discrimination against Pasifika people in the city amplifies the effect of local regulations to rule out drinking in public spaces. This results in their specific pre-loading practices being driven to marginal and ephemeral locations.

In a different sense time also acts as a kind of restraint on pre-loading. This account comes from the transcript of an all-male group of Pākehā university students in a major city.

- Alex I mean yeah the worst part is when you can't start drinking till like nine or ten cause you're trying to organise everything and you start drinking at nine and you're still trying to get those twelve in and by the time you get to town it's messy. *Pākehā FG5*

Alex refers both to a need to be sober while the evening's planning is done via text and/or Facebook messaging, and the widely understood pre-loading quantity for men of a dozen beers. The challenge is to achieve this level of consumption within the familiar timeframe in the evening before midnight when the night-time economy gets underway. Timing is critical and the term "messy" evokes difficulties (perhaps vomiting, aggression, instability) as a consequence of mismanaging the task that could threaten the viability of the night out.

As a participant in an all-male group of Māori students from another big city reported, sometimes miscalculations do occur.

- Tui: I was like "yeah yeah we'll go to town" and we're all dressed and everything and we were just drinking, drinking and it was my birthday too and we were just going hard and yeah nah pre-drinks hard and then nek minute, tera miniti bro I woke up literally ... you know those tables are solid aye, like they said that I fell on the table and then hit the floor and then um I woke up in the morning like on the ground like "oh I didn't make it to town". *Māori FG12*

Tui reports drinking so much at his birthday party pre-loading session that he became unconscious and could not participate in his own celebrations, as an example of what can go wrong. By getting his timing (and quantity) wrong he came up against physiological constraints of consumption that effectively caused his body to shut down.

Discussion

These analyses provide a more detailed understanding of pre-loading in our society, adding to the international literature. For the young adults in this study, pre-loading practices were patterned around price of alcohol, but nevertheless strongly socially driven, located and timed. For young people, it appears that pre-loading is not an epiphenomenon to their drinking cultures, but an important drinking strategy to minimize costs and also enter urban night-time economies in an already-inebriated state (Foster & Ferguson 2013). It is clearly valued among the pleasures of alcohol consumption by our participants, particularly for its social dimensions of bonding and fun in private spaces, but also increases the potential for harms, difficulties and tensions within the current deregulated alcohol environment (Huckle et al. 2012, Measham et al. 2011; Wells et al. 2009a).

As Gordon et al. (2012) conceptualise it, *hedonism* is a powerful driver of pre-loading practices that are about getting drunk enough with friends to at least partially sustain an intoxicated night out. Hadfield's (2011) notion of alcohol 'banking' captures the sense of determined, disciplined action entailed in the service of intoxication. We have argued elsewhere (Lyons et al. 2014) that the framework offered by Gordon et al. (2012) has considerable strengths but we have misgivings about the way in which *hedonism* in particular conceptually fails to account for problematic or unpleasant experiences with alcohol covered in data presented here and other incentives such as overcoming shyness and as a stress-release mechanism, evident in the wider data set. The data also show that social processes in terms of local group pressures, rituals and expectations also play an important role, valuing and entrenching shared experience, bonding and identity. Pre-loading fulfills *multiple functions* that are of interest and importance to young people not only in terms of the ways in which they "make the night", but in broader social and psychological terms. These pro-drinking dimensions are only weakly countered by various *controls*, chiefly perhaps because the deregulation of alcohol in Aotearoa NZ has removed many of the limits that pertain to those over the legal age of purchase. The regulatory provisions that do impact on pre-loading are various local bans on drinking in public places and the very liberal rules around opening hours for the commercial venues of the night-time economy. While these arrangements indirectly structure some characteristics of pre-loading (location and time) they do not operate to restrict it or limit the harms that accrue from it. If we are to reduce this particularly damaging style of consumption there needs to be serious examination and revision of relevant policies, such as legal age of purchase of alcohol products, opening hours, and the taxation and pricing of alcohol; these construct current drinking contexts, and can be employed to challenge the current culture of intoxication, as could investment in interventions to target behavior change.

The findings also resonate with Gordon et al.'s (2012) caveat that drinking cultures are always contextual and contingent upon the cultural conditions within which they occur. There is strong convergence among cultural groups around the hedonistic commitment to intoxication but also some differences that reflect physiological variance by gender and cultural differentiation in drinking patterns and expectations. Despite the evidence that both

genders are strongly engaged in pre-loading practices, key asymmetries arise in both the quantities of alcohol involved and the social practices within which they are embedded. For young women there is a growing expectation that they become empowered and pleasure-seeking but also remain controlled and restrained, which places them in a deeply conflicted position (Griffin et al. 2013; Lyons & Willott 2008). Our data reflect women's interest in intoxication but this is interwoven with rituals of preparation and practices of control of the price and the timing of their socialising. Among male participants pre-loading practices were more consistently encompassed within and interpreted as demonstrating hegemonic masculine drinking styles (Willott & Lyons 2012).

Our data showed Pākehā participants to be most at ease in speaking about the role of alcohol in their lives, cognisant of the protections provided within the research and apparently comfortable with the process of providing data in this manner. They seemed happy speaking with the female Pākehā researcher who was working with them and very willing to discuss details of their relationships with alcohol. Despite working with researchers who were clearly identifiable as of their cultural group, the talk of Māori and Pasifika participants seemed to varying degrees, more constrained, self-monitored and censored. We understand these differences to reflect the lived social experience of participants and the ways in which cultural values, norms and practices play out against 'everyday' power relations. Māori concerns expressed included the tensions of having whanau, employers, teachers, siblings and social services aware of their alcohol use, for example via their SNS pages. For Pasifika participants, amongst whom alcohol use was culturally proscribed, the principal concerns were with church and aiga having such knowledge (Lyons et al. 2014). Their anxiety and efforts over privacy and self-monitoring were more intense than for Māori or Pākehā. Pākehā participants seemed to have little issue with such pressures except perhaps a distant sense that it might impact on employment. Class entered here with some participants who were young Pākehā solo mothers very concerned and vigilant about how they might be being monitored by government agencies around spending on alcohol.

Our findings also demonstrate that these widespread pre-loading drinking practices are associated with some newly salient alcohol-related harms (Measham et al. 2011). These included the dangers of intoxicated travel from private places into the urban night-time economy. A related issue is that groups of 'pre-loaders' are increasingly likely to converge highly intoxicated on locations of choice, contributing to increased aggression, violence, sexual assault and injury around such sites. Another problem arises around the practice of leaving very intoxicated people unattended in private locations, exposed to potentially life-threatening complications from acute alcohol poisoning and related harms. Our research also indicates that risks related to pre-loading may be unevenly distributed across the social formation in line with prevailing gender and ethnic power relations and drinking norms.

The challenges for government and institutional alcohol policy development are to recognise the ways in which these practices contribute to youth drinking cultures and the harms that attach to them. The phenomenon of pre-loading is marked by the quantity and speed of alcohol consumption that are exacerbated by the deregulated, neoliberal market economy of

the country. This climate around alcohol, which is also hugely influenced by contemporary marketing (Carah 2014; Authors 2014; Nicholls 2012), works on multiple dimensions not well encompassed by Gordon et al's (2012) model to expand, enhance and catalyse consumption.

While there is a need for further more detailed study of pre-loading, the findings of this study are highly relevant to debates regarding how to address community and professional concerns about heavy alcohol consumption and its harms. They add to the analysis and recommendations provided in the Law Commission report (New Zealand Law Commission 2010) and support their call for a societal "paradigm shift" around alcohol to reduce consumption and its consequences among young people.

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